

Good Stories for Children

BY
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KENNETH LEARNED TO BE A WIZARD AND BRAVELY RESCUED A PRINCESS

He Changed Himself Into Different Animals and Birds and Was Nearly Killed

A BOY named Kenneth Witherspoon had the most wonderful adventures. He was one of the kind of boys who can't see any use in studying or learning anything, but he was a nice boy for all that. Many lads are like him and do not realize the value of learning things until they are old men, when they have to work for somebody else, and never have time to learn. Kenneth had an uncle named Sutherland, who was so wise that he knew nearly everything, and he used to say that unless one has knowledge he is no more than an animal, for the reason we are so superior to the beasts is merely because by continually learning things we have become able to think logically and thereby better ourselves constantly. All this was too deep for Kenneth, who sometimes wished to be an animal himself, for he envied animals their freedom and independence. He thought that it must be delightful to sleep in the woods and roam through the deep glades with nothing on but hair, and never have to dress in the morning, wash or clean his nails, or study, and have a good fight or scare every day. He didn't realize that the life of nearly every animal is mostly scare all the time, for something or other is after almost every creature almost constantly, and they are hungry pretty much all the time.

Helped a Dying Wizard

One day he was sitting at his bedroom window looking at a picture book, when suddenly he heard a deep groan of pain coming from the open window of the house in the rear. It was an old, tumble-down sort of house in which there lived a strange old man all alone, who never spoke to the neighbors, and therefore was considered crazy. Kenneth listened and soon heard the groan repeated. He determined at once to run over and see what was the matter with Mr. Schmud, the queer old man, for he knew he must be in great pain. He found the front door of Mr. Schmud's house half open, and he went at once to the room from which the sound came, where he found the old man in bed doubled up in agony and almost incapable of speech. Kenneth ran at once for Dr. Ramsey, who gave the old man some medicine, but said that he would surely die that night. He told Kenneth that somebody ought to remain with Mr. Schmud, however, and the boy consented to stay with him all night. He sat there while the old man slept, and was just about falling to sleep himself, when Mr. Schmud suddenly spoke:

"Who are you?" he asked, and when Kenneth had told him his name he said:

"It is kind, indeed, of you to watch over me, but it's of no use. I am a goner this time. I've been near to death many times, but I know he's coming for me now. Well, I suppose it is time, for I am four hundred and fifty years old."

In amazement Kenneth cried:

"Four hundred and fifty years old! Impossible!"

"Yes, that is my age. Few men, even the greatest wizards, attain such years."

"You must be a wizard yourself!" cried the boy.

"At one time," said Mr. Schmud, "I had no equal, but the day of the wizard is past—long past. Once I was an important person and had the world at my feet, but popular education, as well as books on wizarding and conjuring, have done me, as well as all the others, completely up. I suppose that I'm worn out, as a matter of fact, and so have become like all old-fashioned things—obsolete, and therefore to be laid on the shelf. Well, I've had a pretty good time, and I can't complain. No one has had a better."

"If you are a wizard, why are you sick and helpless? Why not utter some magic spell and be cured?" asked Kenneth.

"I tell you I am played out. My time has come. Don't you suppose I've tried all the spells I know. No use! They're no good now. Weakened and worn out, they will not answer. No, I must go, and, after all, I'm rather glad of it, as I am now a back number. Who cares for wizarding nowadays?"

"Well, I do, for one," said Kenneth. "I wish you'd show me a few tricks."

"Alas, my mind has weakened and almost all my life has fled. I can scarcely remember the least of my knowledge."

"How about changing things into other shapes?" asked Kenneth, eagerly. "Do you remember that spell?"

He Learns How to Do It

"Yes," said Mr. Schmud, slowly. "That is the easiest of all. You have but to say 'Rasmataz Om Gaza Presto,' and at the same time think of the shape you desire to assume or have another assume." Kenneth was about to repeat the words after him, but thinking they might work, he halted, and, taking out his pencil, he asked Mr. Schmud to repeat them, whereupon he wrote the words down in his note book. Then he asked:

"How about changing back again into one's first shape? Do you say the same words?"

"No, indeed. You say 'Ompallah Muto Hoch,' as you think of your former shape. I hope you are not going to try it," he added.

"Well, I guess yes," said Kenneth. "I want to know how it feels to be an animal or a fish or something."

"It is a dangerous experiment," said the wizard. "Why?" asked the boy in surprise.

"Because every animal is constantly hunted by others. If you should lose an arm, a leg, or even a feather, it will be found when you resume your own



"HERE HE IS!" CRIED THE OGRE

shape that something just as important will be missing from your body."

"I should think, however, that it would be almost impossible to harm one who knows the spell, as he can change into something else in time to save himself."

"That's quite true, but one has to be as quick as lightning sometimes. I've had such narrow escapes that my blood curdled at times," replied the old wizard. "I could tell you some strange tales if I had my breath."

"I'll bet you could, but you are too feeble now," said Kenneth. "When you are well I'd love to hear them."

"I will die to-night," said Mr. Schmud, "and you'll never hear them. In fact, I am about to die right now." He turned over as he spoke, and, sure enough, he was quite right. He died at once. Then Kenneth, seeing that it was of no use to sit up any longer, went home and to bed.

Mr. Schmud was buried under a big weeping willow, and, strange to say, the tree wept profusely, and it was the first time anybody had ever known a weeping willow to really weep. After the funeral Kenneth went home and sat down to learn by heart the magic words.

Turned Himself Into a Lion

Now, it was very hard for him to study, for he had always evaded that task when possible, and, as you perhaps know, the less you study the harder it is. He finally learned the words, "Rasmataz Om Gaza Presto," and then he devoted some time, but far less time, to learning "Ompallah Muto Hoch." That was his great mistake, for he should, of course, have been far more careful to learn with certainty the latter words, for they were to release him from any shape he assumed. When he was pretty sure that he knew them he began to consider what shape he would take first, for he had been careful not to think of anything while repeating the magic words, for that would, of course, have been very hazardous. He finally decided to be a lion to start with, and he said "Rasmataz Om Gaza Presto" in a low voice, trembling a little, it must be confessed. Now, the wizard had neglected to tell Kenneth that when one wished to take the form of an animal he always was changed into the actual animal that was at the time nearest to him, unless he said also "Bazip," which means free and unconfined; and thus in the twinkling of an eye Kenneth found himself changed into a lion, but a lion in a cage at the Zoo!

He was so startled and amazed that for a few moments he sat on his haunches looking out at the people with a stupid gaze. Then he realized that some mistake must have been made, and he began to cry. All the people ran to the cage to see the lion howl, and soon a keeper came along and poked him with a stick, telling him to be quiet. This made Kenneth mad, and he roared so angrily that even the keeper shrank away in terror, while all the nurses caught up all the babies and fled from the Zoo, crying that the lion was loose. Soon a great crowd had gathered around the cage, staring at Kenneth with big eyes, and, although he knew that he wasn't a real lion, nevertheless it angered him so that he flew at the bars and shook them violently. He heard the keepers say that he was mad and must be shot, and it made him tremble and wish he had never seen Mr. Schmud. He bethought himself that he was the cause of all the trouble, and then he laid himself down in the corner of the cage, pretending to go to sleep. So after a while the crowd dispersed.

All the time Kenneth was trying to think of "Ompallah Muto Hoch," but the words evaded him. He racked his brain, shed bitter tears, stuck his shaggy head into the water can, but he couldn't remember anything but "Hoch." He sat there or walked up and down until night came, when suddenly a little gray mouse entered the cage and began to whisper to him, thinking that he was the regular lion of

that particular cage. Kenneth soon told him the truth, and then the mouse said:

"Why, I was once a man, and was changed into a mouse by a wizard. He said 'Rasmataz Om Gaza Presto Bazip,' which, I afterward learned, means that I was to be a free mouse. You must remember always to say that."

"I wish I could remember to say the other words," said Kenneth, dolefully.

This Mouse Was a Man

"Oh, they'll come back to you soon, and I'm going to ask you to say them for me, too, so I can be a man again. I used to work in your father's plaster manufactory, so you'll be doing him a service as well as me."

As the mouse ceased speaking Kenneth suddenly recollected the magic words and shouted them: "Ompallah Muto Hoch, both of us!"

Instantly he found himself in his room, but the man who had been a mouse was not with him, he having found himself at his own home from which he had been absent so many years. Kenneth was rejoiced at his escape, and almost resolved never to make the perilous experiment again, but in a few days he itched to try it once more. This time he thought he would be a rabbit—a wild one in the woods—and, uttering the words, with the addition of "Bazip," he found himself wiggling his nose under a brush heap at the edge of a forest. He looked around at the wide field, and, seeing a lot of apples lying in the grass near by, he hopped toward them. Just then he heard the loud baying of a hound very near him, and, instantly realizing that the dog was after him, he darted wildly into the woods. He ran for his life, and he heard the dog following. Suddenly he spied a man standing beneath a tree a few yards in front with a gun, watching for his appearance in a clear space, and he stopped. Kenneth knew all about dogs, and so he resolved to take chances with the latter rather than a man with a gun. He waited. When the little beagle was almost upon him he sprang at him as if to eat him up. The beagle, like any dog, was so amazed that his tail fell between his legs, he gave one frightened glance at the rabbit who had attacked him, and then, with a feeble, startled yelp, he fled through the underbrush as fast as his short legs could carry him. Kenneth couldn't help laughing as the dog vanished in the deep woods, and then he said: "Ompallah Muto Hoch" and turned into a boy. The man came to him and asked him if he had seen a rabbit right around there, and he replied:

"No, sir, I did not," which was perfectly true, for he had not seen himself. Then the man whistled and called for his dog, finally going away to look for him, just as every rabbit hunter has to do several times per day.

Joined the Wild Geese

Kenneth laughed and walked away. Soor he changed himself into a quail, and in a few minutes he saw another hawk soaring overhead, and knew that he, too, was searching for food, so he changed himself into a beetle. Hardly had the change been effected than a pretty quail ran at him and tried to seize him, and he scarcely had time to change into a boy. The startled bird, seeing a boy, flew away at once, and then Kenneth altered his shape into that of a big, fat wild goose, for he saw far above him a long line of them slanting across the evening sky. Instantly he was with them, the last in line, and he asked the one in front of him how far they were going.

"We go to the tropics as fast as possible, where there are no hunters."

He followed the others, sweeping along at the rate of a hundred miles an hour. No hawks bothered the great birds, and they were too high for bullets to reach them, although many a hunter

gazed wistfully up at them as they swung along under the fleecy clouds or shot across the wide bays, where boats were moored full of men with guns. Sometimes they settled down at night to feed in the rice swamps, or by day to sleep, far out on the waters, rocking on the waves with their heads under their wings as if in cradles.

The one next to Kenneth was an old bird, and had traveled far, and he told the lad many strange things, not only about geese, but about all sorts of animals and places, so that Kenneth gained a deal of valuable information not set down in books, such, for instance, as the manner of finding your way by night or day across land and sea; how to tell when the frost is approaching or the warm weather, and many other things of a similar nature.

One day as they flew and when they were near to their destination in the lovely tropic lands, Kenneth saw that they were approaching a tall castle covered with green ivy. "Hello!" he cried. "What's that? A castle such as I've seen in my history book!"

"That's the castle of Geezer, the awful ogre. Once he caught twenty-nine of us in a net of magic cobwebs, and I suppose, at them at one meal, for he's big enough," replied the goose. "We will now fly much higher."

Called Upon Old Geezer

"I will leave you," thought Kenneth, "and call upon the ogre, for I much desire to see one, as I thought there were no longer any such." He uttered the words "Ompallah Muto Hoch," and found himself walking across the great lawn in front of the ogre's castle, which had once been a king's residence, but the ogre Geezer had captured him and devoured him as he did every living thing, except the woman who was his housekeeper, old Mrs. Ogdensneider, who, in fact, was far too tough to eat. This old woman instantly appeared at the great doorway, and, shading her eyes with her hand, gazed in amazement at the approaching lad, who didn't seem to know that he was going to his death by coming to Geezer's castle. He was so handsome that the old woman felt sorry for him, although right at that moment there was a very beautiful girl, named Bessie, shut up in a cage in the kitchen fattening for the ogre's Sunday dinner. She called out: "Away, boy, away at once, or you are lost! This is the castle of Geezer, and if he comes back and catches you he'll eat you at once!"

"If he catches me he will, but I guess I am safe enough till then!"

Even as he spoke the frightful ogre sprang from among the trees and seized him by the neck, squeezing him so tight that he could scarcely breathe, and causing him to utterly forget the words of the changing spell. The ogre, chuckling with a vast delight, carried him into the castle, and, opening an iron cage, threw him into it, saying:

"Remain there, my juicy, tender morsel, until lunch time, when I'll have something to discuss with you, I think."

Kenneth's alarm wore away in a few minutes, for he knew that he could easily escape, and he tried to look into the cages near him to see if there were any other captives. The ogre went out laughing heartily, and then the old woman came to the cage. "Had you observed my warning words you would not now be in this fix. I hated to see you caught."

"Then release me," said Kenneth.

"Impossible, now that he knows you are here. He would kill me. There's a little girl in the cage over there, and I'll bring the cage here, so that you can talk to her while you last. He'll eat you to-day or to-morrow, sure."

"I guess not," replied Kenneth. "I may eat him instead."

"Don't be so sassy," replied the old woman. "You are near your end."

Kenneth merely grinned, and she brought the little girl, a lovely creature, who was a king's daughter in Parcheesi, whom the ogre had caught weeks before, but who cried so much that she didn't get fat. Kenneth waited until the old woman had departed, and then he told her to cheer up, as he would soon get her out of the cage and home again. So she smiled for the first time since she had come there, and said she would wait. The ogre came back at noon and told the old woman to kill Kenneth and broil him. She took him out and laid him on the table, but there, right before her eyes, just as she had raised the knife, he turned into a flea and hopped into her hair.

"Witchcraft! Witchcraft!" she cried out, tumbling over backward, and Kenneth quickly hopped into the cage, where the little girl sat, frozen with horror, and he turned into a boy again. She was amazed, but when he whispered to her, telling her what he could do, she almost danced with joy. Meanwhile the old woman and Geezer were looking for him under tables and chairs and in closets, and wondering where on earth he had hidden himself.

"I'll now turn myself into a rattlesnake, creep out and bite him," said Kenneth.

"Oh, that would be dreadful, and I can't bear to think of it!" cried the tender-hearted Princess. "Can't you do something not quite so bad?"

Made the Giant Harmless

"All right. Let me think. What's the most harmless thing? How about a white mouse?"

The ogre stood in the middle of the room as she answered:

"I can't bear a mouse—not even a white one."

Said the ogre, thoughtfully: "Could he have lifted the trapdoor of the treasure vault, I wonder?"

"Impossible," said the woman. "It's far too heavy even for me."

"I'll take a look," said Geezer, and he lifted a great slab of the floor stones by an iron ring and looked into the darkness beneath. "He's not there, for it's so full of gold and gems that there's not even room for a cat." He dropped the stone with a clang and came to the little girl's cage, for he had made up his mind to eat her at once, and he intended to do the killing himself, for he thought the old woman was far too careless with the provisions, anyway. He uttered a shout when he saw Kenneth there, and yelled: "Here he is! I'll have him out and chop his head off at once, for I'm nearly famished."

"Rasmataz Om Gaza Presto Bazip!" shouted Kenneth. "Be a guinea pig right where you stand, you old ruffian!"

Instantly the dreadful ogre changed into a mild and pink-eyed guinea pig sitting there looking at them. Then Kenneth changed the old woman Ogdensneider into a green parrot, and she began to shriek and laugh as she hopped around the room.

"Now we are safe," said Kenneth, "and I'll just change for a moment into a rat and slip outside."

This he did, and then, resuming his own shape, he opened the cage and released the Princess, after which he picked up the guinea pig and put him safely into a small cage on the wall.

"Now," said he, "you'll stay there and think about the fun you've had, for you'll never have any more I guess. I'll take you home, so that I can keep an eye on you."

Then he lifted the trapdoor and looked down into the treasure vault, and was astonished to find it completely filled with gold, diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, pearls and other precious stones, beyond any counting whatever, and worth so many millions that it couldn't put it down properly in figures, I am certain.

"How shall I carry it all away?" he thought. Then, after a while he had an idea, and he hunted through the castle until he found many trunks, which he filled with the treasure until he had a dozen, and yet it seemed to make scarcely any impression on the vast hoard below. Then he changed himself into a huge elephant and the Princess into an elephant driver, after which he placed all the trunks on his back, put her on top, and started for her father's home in Parcheesi, which they reached before morning dawned.

He Married the Princess

They resumed their shapes and went into the palace, where everybody was overcome with joy at seeing the lost girl. Kenneth met the king, and the Princess told her father what he had done. The monarch said he should marry her, as a reward, and that was just what Kenneth wished. He went back that day with the Princess, and they loaded the rest of the treasure in a hundred carts, and took the guinea pig and parrot also to the palace. All this immense treasure made Kenneth the richest of all rich men, and the king the greatest king on earth, for even kings need money as much as anybody, and a poor king is of little account nowadays. After the wedding they came to America for a while, and all of the papers printed their pictures, but Kenneth had to go back soon to Parcheesi, for the king missed him so much that he was sick. He still lives there, and will be the next king, but he never changes himself into other shapes any more, because he promised his wife that he would always be himself. The guinea pig soon died, but the parrot is alive yet, and lives in a gold cage set with diamonds. I want to caution all of you right now never to use these magic words in earnest, for there is no knowing what might happen if you did. I'll not be responsible for any trouble if you do. — pray remember that, and don't blame me if you are changed into a crocodile or a zebra after saying "Rasmataz Om Gaza Presto Bazip."

WALT McDUGALL.

